

By the Same Author

RELIGION IN PLAIN CLOTHES (2/6 net)

# YOUR BETTER SELF

BY  
W. H. ELLIOTT

1936  
IVOR NICHOLSON AND WATSON  
LIMITED LONDON

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FIRST EDITION	NOVEMBER 1935
REPRINTED	NOVEMBER 1935
REPRINTED	DECEMBER 1935
REPRINTED	DECEMBER 1935
REPRINTED	AUGUST 1936

Printed in Great Britain by  
Butler & Tanner Ltd.  
Frome and  
London

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## FOREWORD

**T**HE articles that are collected here were published first in the *Sunday Pictorial*, and I want to acknowledge gratefully the constant courtesy and help that I have received from its Editor.

I welcome also this opportunity of thanking my Publishers, who have been most patient with me and given me the encouragement of very kindly consideration.

From week to week these articles have been written. Sometimes I have sent them forth happily, feeling that in them there was something that I wanted to say. Now and then I have let them go reluctantly with a sense that though the idea was in my mind I had failed to express it. However, I have spoken enough in my life and written enough to know how often these first impressions are quite wrong. It has happened so with these articles. One or two that caused me exceptional discontent and misgiving brought me numbers of letters from people up and down England who found in them a word or two of help. If among them all, as they are now collected together, there are a few that may strike this person or that and do a little something to challenge thought, to cheer or to console, I shall be sincerely thankful. For it is with that intent that I send them out again upon other journeys.

W. H. ELLIOTT.

November, 1935.

## INTRODUCTION

I AM invited to write a series of articles on some of the problems, big and small, that are connected with everyday life. Most of these problems contain clear issues of right and wrong, and on that basis I shall try to discuss them. I write of course quite definitely as one who believes absolutely in the Christian faith, but as one also who knows quite well that it is not always so very easy to translate that faith into the words and deeds of daily living.

We are living in a world that at first sight looks thoroughly pagan. Its ideals are a flat contradiction of the teaching of Christ. Its motives are predominantly selfish. Its prizes are offered to those who can qualify for them by a certain sort of success, which by Christian standards should be reckoned very often (though not always) as conspicuous failure.

Yet it is an unhappy world. It is a disillusioned world. Something has gone wrong with it. It has lost its nerve. It has wandered out of its path among the stars. At times it seems to some of us that it is going mad. It appears to be thinking of progress merely in terms of pace, though there is not much sense in that if we are rushing merely from one stupidity to another. And its scale of values is so ridiculous that we can only compare it to a shop

window after a lunatic had spent a happy hour changing round all the tickets.

That is the modern world, not merely as a parson sees it but as most of us see it. Young people in particular are telling us pretty plainly what they think. It is not my business to talk about politics, but I may point out at least this—that the confusion in politics is simply the reflection of the confusion that exists in the minds of men, magnified on the grand scale and thrown on the world screen.

What we all want in the midst of this confusion is to see clearly a way of living, a way that commends itself to our reason, a way that commends itself also to the strange faculty within us that we call our Conscience, and a way that looks to be a possible and a practicable one for people like ourselves to tread.

Here of course we meet our first difficulty. For we want to rule out at once all the idealists. We admit freely enough that many of their ideas are attractive in themselves, but we doubt whether they can be made to work. The last few years have played havoc with our self-conceit. Indeed, we often speak of human nature with open contempt. It is a poor thing, we say, but there it is and we cannot change it. Let us be practical and give up our thoughts of the best that could be, keeping ourselves down to earth with more tangible plans for the second-best or the third-best that may be within our reach. Why waste time in dreaming dreams? We have had our turn at dreaming, and how much of it has come true?

So with angry impatience we turn away from the

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books that we don't like, and the speeches and the articles, only to meet, as we sit awhile and think, the dreamer within ourselves. For there is something in man that insists upon dreaming. It rejects all our practical arguments. It brushes aside all our easy excuses, and reproaches us for being what we are.

We could be better, it seems, if we tried. At heart we are thoroughly discontented with our mean little ways, with our puny and selfish aims, with the dreary succession of empty years that leaves us so bitter at the last, with the futility that haunts us from youth to age and makes us stand and stare hopelessly at life again and again with the great question—Why?

This obstinate dreamer we often call "our better self." It is inclined to sleep, if we will let it, though continually it is aroused into active life and protest when the rest of us—"the worst self"—is very busy with some profitable plan of its own.

For some of us the "better self" is very drowsy indeed and sleeps deeply. In others its sleep is light. The mere glimpse of goodness in another life will awaken it. An unexpected kindness will do it, too, or some little courtesy that seems to be sincerely meant, or a touch of tragedy somewhere that calls from deep to deep for a little human sympathy or help.

In every man of every sort the "better self" still lives. The worth of our human contacts and relationships depends upon whether or not we can appeal to that better self in the people whom we know. Some can do it easily and often. They leave behind them new impulses of courage and of hope. Some can do it rarely. When they knock at a neighbour's door, it is his worse self that comes out. Unhappily,



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as they go miserably away, they judge their neighbour by what they saw, and it never occurs to them that they rang the wrong bell. If we want Dr Jekyll, we must not ring Mr Hyde's bell. For both of them (as I suppose R. L. Stevenson in that story meant us to conclude) live in the same house.

Here then is a subject to which we may wisely turn our minds—the better self, how it is to emerge from all the tangles and undergrowth that we know to exist in the mysterious depths of personality, and how it is to find its proper way of life.

# YOUR BETTER SELF

## I BELIEVE IN MAN

**W**HETHER we know it or not, we all of us live by faith. If we do not believe in God, at any rate we must believe in man. We can never surrender that belief except by cutting ourselves off entirely from human society. So long as we are living with and amongst our fellow-men, we must be prepared to trust somebody, and there's an end to it.

I know that this is an age of mutual suspicion. Before we have any dealings with strangers, we ask for references. Even with people whom we know we are often on the look out for secret motives. We are never quite sure that any man means what he says. In scanning the morning's letters we have to cultivate the art of reading between the lines.

It is not at all easy to live one's life in a world like this without becoming sour and bitter and cynical. There is nothing more painful than being "let down," as we say, and having our trust betrayed. Indeed there are some to whom that experience means a permanent disablement. They can never trust again.

Yet here we all are trusting blindly to the general integrity of men whom we have never seen. I sit quietly in this room and it never occurs to me that the ceiling may fall in. Somebody built that ceiling,

but I don't know who it was. None the less I trust him. I jump into a train, knowing well enough that my life is in the hands of the engine driver or the signalman down the line. If I went to ask the names of either of those men or inquire into their family histories I should be thought quite mad. In fact, I should think myself mad. The same man opens his evening paper and just waits for the train to start. He is showing an amazing faith in his fellow-men for all that.

All commerce depends obviously upon credit. But credit is only a business word for faith in human nature. The loss of that faith for one single hour would bring about the immediate collapse of our economic system. Panic would seize the world, and after that would come anarchy. It is faith that holds us together financially, and it does not require a great thinker to see that nothing but this same faith can ever hold us together internationally. All our crises to day are the result of fear, which of course is simply and solely lack of confidence. Confidence is the political word for faith.

I need only mention family life, though without any doubt at all "the foundation of a nation's life is in the homes of its people." I never take a wedding service without marvelling at the almost incredible faith that a woman can have in a man and a man in a woman. We expect that faith, for without it there could be no homes. Do we quite realise how much we expect?

A cynic might point to homes that have come to grief. Others of us might answer by talking about many homes that we have known where faith has not

come to grief There have been troubles, no doubt, and misunderstandings and all sorts of ups and downs, but faith has won through The partnership that began with a great act of trust has lasted The trust has been justified Human nature, so much maligned, has been capable at least of that And is it such a small achievement, when you come to think of it?

Quite often we lose patience with ourselves We get into despondent moods We accuse ourselves and reproach ourselves and almost despair of ourselves, because we are not what we should like to be How many of us would like our inmost thoughts or our daydreams or our most cherished ambitions to be revealed openly to our friends?

It may happen that somebody reading this is in just that state of mind I would bid him to remember that he cannot condemn himself unless he has within him a definite code of honour, which he reverences and would observe if he could Possibly there is something of which he has good reason to be ashamed, and out of his inward distress and humiliation there may come the impulse to better things But shame always means an ideal, and where there is an ideal there is a real longing to attain to it, some day, somewhere Let him give himself credit for that much and brace himself to new effort What he really wants he will get in the long run, if he wants it hard enough That is a law of life

If there is a lot of bad stuff in the best of us, as certainly there is, there is certainly a lot of good stuff in the worst of us The Christian Gospel despairs of no man Christ Himself knew what was in man and needed not that any should tell Him Neverthe-

less He lived and died with a faith in man that was never broken. Even at the lowest point of degradation and despair there is an "imprisoned splendour" in man, if we can only get it out. In every life there is a sleeping beauty, if we can only awaken it. But I should say that it is just there that we need the help of God.

One thing is certain—that if God believes in us, in spite of all our shortcomings, we can believe in each other. Trust brings out the best in the most surprising way. Suspicion fosters and produces the worst. Those who do most to help us on our way are not those who load us with good advice but those who believe in us. Our most dangerous enemies are those who obviously don't believe in us. Has anybody any right to treat us quite like that? Have we any right so to treat another?

## IF A MAN DIE

**T**HE revival of a man's better self is sometimes nothing better than a resurrection. For it may be that the better self has been long dead. How else can I describe it when a man quite obviously is blind to beauty that he once saw in life, deaf to voices that in the old days he was ready to hear, unresponsive to affection that used to mean so much, lifeless and inert when there is at hand some plain and urgent duty to be done? Something in the man is dead, and quite possibly he knows it. None of us can bury our ideals or abandon our standards of honour without knowing where we laid them.

Conscience is a troublesome thing, when we are looking up at a tree that holds forbidden fruit, but it is at least a sign that our souls are still alive. The better self is awake. The good in us is active enough to be felt and heard. But the voice of conscience gets very thin and uncertain if again and again quite deliberately we disregard it. Then it fades to a whisper, scarcely discerned even when we are pondering our plans in silence and alone. In fact, the time may come when conscience, so often spurned and rejected, has nothing to say to us at all. When we have got to that point, we are in a very desperate state, for we have lost the power to distinguish good from evil. We can go on, as so many do, living our

selfish and sordid little lives without a moment of uneasiness or of remorse or of self-reproach. We have silenced the opposition. The better self is dead.

In such a condition of living death nothing can save us but a resurrection. To a logical mind that may sound quite impossible and absurd, but then life is not always logical. Resurrections have happened, thousands of them, long before now, and the better self within a man, long dead and wellnigh forgotten, has leapt miraculously to life. Old-fashioned people, of whom I am one, may call that mysterious awakening by a special name—conversion. Some of you who read this article may not like that name, but none of you can deny the fact that it describes. Conversions have happened.

The Parable of the Prodigal Son gives us an instance, and we are to take it as an instance not of a rare and remarkable phenomenon but of something continually repeated in human experience. The younger son in that story left his house and went to a far country. There he lived a life of reckless folly and wasted all his substance in riotous living. After that he began to be in want and was reduced to a pitiful existence that he shared with the beasts. Then suddenly something happened to him. "He came to himself." Those are the words of the story, and there are no words that could describe more vividly how, by some touch of the divine upon it, the old dead forgotten self revived, took control again and led him back to better things. That can happen now. No man can sink so low that he is beyond the reach of the touch that calls to resurrection.

On Easter Day therefore we have to keep in mind

two kinds of death—the death of the body and the death of the soul. The death of the body with its mystery need not frighten us overmuch, since after all the body is only a garment that we wear, a most friendly and serviceable garment, but one that in any case is not meant to last for ever. If we were just animated bodies and nothing more, death of course would be the end of us. But we are very much more than animated bodies.

To estimate a man's worth by his strength of body would be sheer stupidity. Even this mad world of ours, with all its distorted values, has never tried to do that. Some of the greatest personalities have lived their lives and done their work almost in spite of their bodies, so frail were they and handicapped by physical infirmity. It is safe to say that some of the noblest qualities of human nature are to be seen here and there in old people, who have treasured up within themselves the hard-won lessons of the years, though their bodies now are long past their prime of usefulness and almost beyond repair.

It is the spirit in man that determines his true worth. It is the spirit in man that shows itself in everything that he does, whether he paints a picture or writes a book or manages an office or sweeps a crossing with an old broom. It is the spirit in man that we like or dislike, that we love in a friend or suspect in one who is not a friend. It is the spirit in man that goes on after the death of the body into a life beyond our seeing, where there is a work to be done and a loveliness to be unfolded beyond all our imagining.

What then can concern us more vitally than this



elfish and sordid little lives without a moment of measiness or of remorse or of self-reproach—living creatures—be more senseless than to feed the body and mind

I—as we are so careful to do, and to neglect almost entirely the sustenance that is due to the soul? Can we wonder that so many of us are hungry for we know not what? Ought we to be surprised that life, even when it answers to the full our craving for good that we want to possess, leaves us so pitifully unsatisfied? We forget the soul, which is the true self, and the soul grows very faint and weary. Sometimes it dies.

Do we not need, many of us, a resurrection of our better self? Are we to try to forget all those dead hopes that lie buried deep among and beneath our memories, those dead dreams, those dead ideals, those dead loyalties and affections? Or would it be better on Easter Day to send up our humble call to the Christ who can bring them back to life?

CAN WE DIE AND FIDDLE ?

**I**F love sweet and unpalatable, of course does go sour, more bitter And love that it was ever love at all, forget

Jealousy is still one of the re-  
us feels very much ashamed if we in  
us, nor should we think that we had under  
if we said of somebody else that in one another  
he was "just a little bit jealous."

It catches us early, too, for the baby knows something about it before he leaves his mother's arms. In growing families, where children are brought up together, it is always one of the chief perils. Let a parent begin to show a preference for one child more than another, and at that moment jealousy will poke its ugly head inside the nursery door. Once there it will whisper the most spiteful things to little ears, with consequences that perhaps may last as long as life.

There is no crime known to man that jealousy has not committed. It has left terrible stories in our history books. It never fails to add another tragedy to the news of every day. There is absolutely nothing in the world that is safe from it. It gets into politics and into commerce and into religion, as well as into the personal relationships that we have one with another. It leaves behind it a pitiful trail of broken homes and broken

hearts and broken hopes Yet we speak of it sometimes as "petty" and regard it as respectable

This is just one of the points on which we shall get a shock when we pass into the world unseen, and look at life in its true values as it is, including ourselves and the part that we played in it The vices that our human society condemns are bad enough in all conscience, but it is the respectable sins, like jealousy, that are undermining the whole fabric of our civilization Sit back and think about that for five minutes You will find it obviously true

It takes a very big man to go through life without jealousy of some sort and to keep his nature free from any of the bitterness and resentment that jealousy brings I am not thinking of people who are "door-mats," and appear to like it Such folk seem to have no spirit in them When I wonder why, I feel sometimes that it was jealousy that once crushed the spirit out of them To be utterly past feeling or caring, when there come slights and sneers and disappointments that in others produce such aching wounds, is surely unnatural To accept a position of cringing inferiority is plainly unjust In souls like these jealousy has done its most deadly work

It is not easy for any of us who have wanted to do something in life worth doing to watch others doing it better In any true estimate of life the work of course matters far more than the worker So long as the work gets done that is all that need concern us Whether or not our contemporaries have passed us in the race, whether younger men with less experience (as we think) have climbed up to the positions that we wanted, whether the glittering prizes have gone to

other hands than ours, are questions that ought not to darken our days or to keep us awake at nights. But they do.

How indeed can we expect anything else in a world where life is such a fierce struggle to survive, where in spite of all our moralising we have seen with our own eyes the Devil taking the hindmost? How can we do our best if we neither notice nor care that we are losing ground? How can we grown-ups pretend that places and prizes do not count when we look eagerly for those very things in the reports that our children bring home from school? And the children of course know it.

Even then, one might say, there is no reason why we should show bitterness or resentment towards those in this breathless competition have fared better than ourselves. After all, they have done us no wrong. It is rare enough to see success and failure keeping very close company together. Success of course may be proud and forgetful. But failure also may be sensitive and suspicious overmuch, looking for where nothing of the kind was meant. Failure is quite sure of success. It only needs some pretext to turn the old alliance into a new hostility. That is why I said that jealousy is love gone sour.

The same sort of ambition worms its way into our affections. We want to be first or nowhere. Parents, for example, are apt to be rather "possessive" in their love for their children, and thereby of course they lose them in the end. Possessiveness in any human relationship is always both stupid and wrong. Love, that is worth calling love, finds its main delight in giving. Possessiveness, quite obviously, finds its chief

satisfaction in getting. It is when we are thwarted in that attempt at getting for ourselves a coveted affection that our love turns sour.

When things like this are pointed out to us we are likely to agree quickly enough, for the better self within us is still able to discern what is right and to approve it. But it is not without a mighty conflict that the better self can win this particular battle. We are all very human.

What we have to do is to examine ourselves very closely about our motives. Selfish motives—in work or in friendship—prompt us to an attempted domination, which will tolerate no rivals. If we get what we want, jealousy is the shadow behind the throne. If we don't get what we want, jealousy is the chief inquisitor. Unselfish motives, on the other hand, that seek to give and not to get, leave our souls in peace, whatever in life may happen to us. Perhaps love, that is true love, can never turn sour. But how much of it is there in a world like this?

## ARE YOU A GOOD HATER?

**I**T is said quite often of kind-hearted people when they die (though not so often while they are still alive and well) that they never made an enemy nor at any time spoke an uncharitable word about anybody.

I used to think that the most desirable of all epitaphs, but now I am not quite so sure. Is it not best, after all, to be honest, and, if honesty is to have a say in the matter, how can any of us pretend that it is possible even for a year to keep the tongue from spiteful and bitter speaking, though afterwards what was said in haste may well be repented at leisure? I do not mean that we should not have a try at it. Nor would I suggest that there are not here and there people who seem to be incapable of any sort of malice or resentment. But for ordinary folk, like you and me, it is best not to claim too much.

It is not always a compliment to a man to say that he never made an enemy. Perhaps what we mean is that he never wanted to make an enemy—a very different thing. There are times when all of us have to make a firm stand in defence of some moral principle or to take a strong line in support of what seems to be a vital cause. None of us can do that without a real risk of losing friends and of making enemies. Men have not yet learnt to fight without some touch

of bitterness. Opposition of any kind we dislike and resent. We shall go on resenting it as long as there is any pride left in us. At the moment there is quite a lot.

Those anæmic folk who never make a firm stand and never take a strong line because they are afraid to do it don't succeed more than the others in escaping the malice of some of their neighbours. They are caught too often agreeing with both sides. In the end they are despised by their friends almost as much as they despise themselves. To spend one's life sitting on a fence is as undignified as it is uncomfortable. And of course it is nothing less than downright disloyalty. A man must take sides.

Now it seems that this is going to be rather a cynical article, though I don't mean it to be like that at all. I only want to point out that most of us are capable of a good deal of hatred, and it is as well to face that fact. Old Dr Johnson it was who said, "I like a good hater." Even Pascal wrote, 'All men naturally hate one another. I hold it a fact that if men knew exactly what one says of the other, there would not be four friends in the world.' If really and truly we have a fact there the destiny of our very souls may depend upon the way in which we deal with it.

I have hinted already that pride of some sort is at the bottom of most of our intense dislikes and resentments. It angers us that any friend of ours should not think as we think. For of course in our own estimate of ourselves we are always right. Since therefore we are always right what can be the motive of those who oppose us but sheer stupidity or a deliberate desire to injure us? That being so, it would be too much

surely to expect us to be friendly towards them. Our only course is to show ourselves unfriendly—the first step towards hatred. Sometimes the years as they come and go prove to us what fools we are, but not always.

However, there is more in it than that. There is a queer and ugly process going on continually in the human mind, whereby we find some relief in condemning in others faults that we know to be in ourselves. We know that those faults are there, but we will not face them nor will we admit even to ourselves that we possess them. To face them would take far more moral courage than we have got. To admit them would be most painful, a sure shock to our pride, a sad humiliation of ourselves in our own eyes. The only thing to do is to disown them, to forget them, to bury them deep below the level of consciousness, if we can. That would be the end of it, for the time being at any rate, if it were not for that obstinate better self within us which insists that those faults are unworthy, despicable, and very plainly to be condemned. There is nothing for it therefore but to condemn them, if we are to have any peace at all. So we do condemn them, when we see them in other people.

I wonder how many of us realise that *this* is how the mind works. Often the men and women whom we dislike or despise are those who really are most like us. The fundamental reason why we dislike them is that they seem to be showing those same faults that are causing such havoc in our own lives. An enemy is a much better mirror than a friend. In an enemy we can see very clearly, much more clearly than we want to see, what we are in ourselves.



If we are wise then, we shall try to understand our hatreds and enmities. The feeling of resentment should be a symptom to us that there is something wrong within. That a man should hate himself as he hates his neighbour would seem a strange parody of what Christ said, but there is a big truth in it. In fact it is the dark cloud of which the saying of Christ is the silver lining. And in that sense anyhow, though in no other, it is well that each of us should be a good hater.

## THE ROYALTY OF SERVICE

*(Written for the Sunday after the Silver Jubilee)*

**I**F poetry be "emotion remembered in tranquillity," most of us on this particular Sunday ought to have thoughts that are worth thinking. The Monday of the Jubilee was an experience quite amazing and unforgettable, but it takes time for the deep significance of such an event to sink into us. We need to ponder it awhile in our minds, to sort out our impressions, to look at the picture again from a little distance and see it in bold outline as it is.

Certainly it has done us good in anxious days like these to feel the thrill of our national unity. I do not think that we have felt it in that sort of way since the war. For we are a very silent and undemonstrative people. Only once in a generation do we "let ourselves go," as we all did on Monday, but, when we do, it means a lot.

So many things have happened in these last few years that might have divided us as a people. Crises have come to us that have shaken rudely the rest of the world. Again and again problems have arisen, so tremendous, so intricate, apparently so insoluble as to challenge the stability of our national life. For millions of our folk times have been desperately hard, and out of that hardness might have sprung bitterness and angry resentment. Yet through it all and beneath

it all there has been what the Archbishop at St Paul's called "the deep underflow of a spirit of unity, confidence, and steadfast strength" On a Sunday like this, when we can remember in tranquillity, we do well indeed to be thankful

What we acclaim in the King himself is no mere figurehead, to represent, when it needs to be represented, the dignity of the nation's life In this restless age nothing of that sort by itself could have held us together He has made himself the true and fit expression of our common life by sharing it with us Into the experiences of ordinary folk, both in their sorrows and their joys, he has found a way of entering, quietly, understandingly, fully We know that what happens to any of us matters to him It was his own voice on Jubilee night, when for the moment the whole nation was giving itself to appropriate rejoicing, that spoke with the most moving sympathy of the disabled and the unemployed And his main thought then, as throughout these twenty five years, was of giving himself anew to the service of his people

I wonder if we realise though how essentially royal these two virtues are—sympathy and service In doing homage and honour to the King on Monday we were doing homage and honour to these noble human qualities, by which he himself has made kingliness more kingly Happy is the nation that not only sees these things and acclaims them in its King and its Queen, but also sets itself to imitate them in the dealings of man with man in the affairs of everyday life

Perhaps we might ask ourselves two plain questions Do we understand what true dignity is? Some of us obviously are rather afraid of losing it How else can

we explain the little barriers that we so often put up to separate us and certain others from those who are not, as we think, of our sort or our set? How else can we excuse those little pedestals that we are always trying to build in order that we may stand above our fellows, possibly that from such a trifling eminence we may look down upon them or derive some satisfaction in watching them look up at us? It is the old illusion of pride, which after all cuts a very ridiculous figure, if we only knew it, when a little real human sympathy, ranging itself quietly and sincerely with all sorts and conditions of men, would win so soon the dignity of genuine affection. What more can we want than a royal example of a royal virtue?

Here is the other question. Do we value and honour as we ought a life that is devoted to human service and the marks that such a life may have left upon the man or the woman who has offered it? The pageantry of Monday brought with it the wearing of many decorations, in silver and crimson and gold. I thought as I saw them of all the tales that most of those decorations could tell—tales of risk and heroism, tales of pain and peril and sacrifice. But I thought also of working folk who are sometimes so ashamed of their working clothes. Working clothes represent a most honoured livery, and he who wears them, whatever he may be, has an immediate claim to our respect. He too is dedicating his life to the service of the people. We may not disown him in any way without at the same time questioning our loyalty to the King, an untiring worker for the common good, and, more, without irreverence to God Himself. Who Himself in His Providence has given us work as a law and a delight.

## YOUR BETTER SELF

It is not so bard to see that in this spirit and in this spirit alone we can keep our happy unity and rejoice in it. The King and Queen have shown us how royalty can be brought into common life. What the nation thinks of that has been proved by the cheers of millions. Let those cheers be echoed again and again in the hearts of struggling men and women by the comradeship and neighbourly service that we offer them.

## CAN YOU FACE LIFE?

**I** LIKE the man who can face life without flinching. To a youngster that may sound easy enough, but he will learn more about it when he gets older. Life is a tough problem for most of us, and for some it is positively terrifying. To face it under those conditions, as so many do, with a stolid patience, that rarely complains and never whines, is nothing less than heroism.

To my mind this has been the most conspicuous virtue in the generation that is now slowing down into retirement and old age. Nobody could call that generation particularly able, except of course in mechanical inventions, where it has shown a cleverness that the world never saw before. It has made stupendous mistakes. It has missed extraordinary opportunities. It has been so blind to plain facts that even now we simply cannot understand its appalling miscalculations. But anyhow it has been strong and very courageous. Barrie calls that "the lovely virtue." So indeed it is.

Young folk have no idea at all of what the stress and strain of these years have been. They cannot realise what dreadful issues have been in the balance. And therefore they are unable to do any sort of justice to the almost incredible courage and patience and steadfastness that have shone with such a warm glow through the darkness of our times.

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Those stars, mind you, are still shining I for one am amazed and humbled and exhilarated by letters that I get day by day, showing one after another the sheer heroism of people up and down the country who are fighting a desperate battle for existence with a pluck that defies description All of them would laugh if I called them anything but ordinary men and women, and so the world reckons them Let them consider themselves ordinary then, for I can think of no finer tribute to our common humanity

We talk about unemployment, for example, and we use words that voice to some extent our concern and our sympathy But how many of us are there who can feel what unemployment means? Putting ourselves in the place of a man who has been out of work for years, with a family at home looking to him for support, what would be our state of mind? How would life look to us when we got up in the morning? How would it feel to us at night, after one more day of tramping about and hearing again and again that no place could be found for us to do any kind of job? That is what we cannot reabse And, not being able to realise it, we are not able to measure the downright valour of the men, women and children, who, in the face of such unrelenting adversity, go quietly on

Then of course I think of the hospitals and the astounding courage which within their walls becomes almost a commonplace, a thing to be expected of any man or any woman who next comes in I remember little rooms that I know here and there, and the wonderful folk who in those rooms have been bedridden these many years, Christmas after Christmas, May after May, looking out on sunny days and on rainy

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days at the same old grey wall, and who in spite of it are more cheerful and more hopeful than you or I. How do they do it?

It seems to me sometimes that human nature is capable of big achievements but not of small. It can face the dreadfulness of eternal things but not the irritation of trifling things. It can brace itself to endure cancer, but it cannot put up with a headache. Is there any story anywhere of a hero who by some miracle became just as big or just as small as the enemies that he happened to be fighting, a giant against giants, an insect against insects? If that story does not exist, I present the plot gladly to some eager author. For human nature is like that. Strange it may be, but I am sure that it is true.

Nevertheless, the picture has another side to it. There are millions to-day who cannot face life. Secretly they are afraid of it, though of course they would never admit that even to themselves. But they live in a state of continual apprehensiveness, as though bad news must be always on the way and to-morrow full of troubles that are lying in wait to attack them. In some book that I have read one of the characters put a motto on his desk or at his bedside—"To-morrow will be splendid." He was a wiser man than most, though quite possibly even he was trying to contradict a lurking doubt.

It goes without saying that to-morrow is always an uncertainty. Life, like death, is "an awfully big adventure." But, looked at in the right way, that is its greatest mercy and its unending fascination. Why should we prepare ourselves for the worst? Why should we torment ourselves with imaginary ills, and



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be deaf to the good that may be knocking at the door?

Some of us have never grown up That is one of our troubles Our real selves are still childish, afraid of the dark, terrified of the unknown, unsure of ourselves and of other people, looking round always for someone to protect us and to guide us and to be kind to us We have never learnt to stand on our own feet And some of the rest of us have never looked deeply enough into life to find any meaning in it To me at least there is only one meaning that makes any sense, and that is the conviction that, if only we will have it so, we are within the good and wise providence of God To believe that does not mean that life will be suddenly transformed and made easy Indeed, it may turn out to be quite the opposite But it does mean that in the long run nothing can hurt us, except by our own will and consent, and that in the same long run we shall find all things working together for our good If we can be sure of that, you and I, we can face life

## THE TWENTY-PAST EIGHT FACE

I WAS sitting with some young folk the other evening talking of this and that, when one of them opposite to me, sitting as it happened under a clock, began to laugh both loudly and long. It was good to hear—that laugh—and so infectious that we all had to join in it. The clock seemed to enjoy the joke as well, for the hands at ten-past nine certainly suggested an expression of amusement. Had it been a little later, at ten-past ten, say, I might have been forgiven for stating that on the clock face there was a broad grin. All this I pointed out, and added that I liked the look of the clock at such a moment better than at twenty-past eight, when the hands are set in a deepening melancholy. Then somebody remarked that there are people in the world, far too many of them, whose faces, read as a clock, are always at half-past twelve.

Now I think that this is a matter that is past a mere joke. At least it takes to itself a certain seriousness, when you come to consider it. The twenty-past eight face bothers me a little, for lots of us have it, perhaps most of all at that very hour in the morning when human nature is not quite at its best. And I am sure that if any of us turn that sort of face to the world, we are casting gloom all around us. It may be that a conscious resolve to avoid doing this and to keep a

cheerful countenance, if only for the sake of others, is a much bigger virtue than we sometimes imagine.

All of us were born in tears, but in some the smiles came very soon, and they seem to have been smiling ever since. Somewhere within them there is a deep spring of irresistible hilarity. They see the funny side of everything. Life and human nature being what they are, it is only natural that now and again we should "get underneath things" and feel that we are far beyond our depth in angry waters that threaten to submerge us. These other folk, of whom I am thinking, are not quite like that. There is a strange buoyancy in them, and it enables them to keep popping up to the surface whatever storms may come.

Let me say at once that I envy them, not only because quite obviously they are getting more enjoyment out of life than most of us, but because also they are doing more than they know to create happiness in others. I believe that happiness, like religion, is not so often found by search as caught by infection.

All of us know the difference between working with a person who is cheerful and working with somebody who is so glum and overcast with his own grey thoughts that he has scarcely a word to say. In each case it is a question of atmosphere, and the right atmosphere is quite vital to the efficiency of any work as well as to the serenity of mind of those who are doing it. In a commercial age like this we might not agree so easily with Robert Louis Stevenson that "a happy man or woman is a better thing to find than a five-pound note," but anyhow there is no denying that "he or she is a radiating force of goodwill, and their entrance

into a room is as though another candle had been lighted."

In a home cheerfulness is often a decisive factor in the growing lives of little children. Children are always very sensitive to atmosphere. They can feel when something has gone wrong. They know at once if there has been a quarrel. We are foolish to suppose that anxious discussions about making ends meet or about the possibility of war, for example, are beyond their understanding and go over their heads. Probably they do not understand much in logic, but they do understand a lot in feeling, and that is why so often after overhearing gloomy talks and looking into gloomy faces the iron enters into their souls, leaving them in their lonely hours to face life unhappily and afraid.

The worst of it is that these first impressions sometimes continue throughout life. To take one instance, how many men born in a struggling little home, where every penny has to be counted, have quite lost the secret dread that they or their own children may be left some day without money?

Yet the grown man also is childish enough to be impressionable. The cheery looks of his friends and neighbours never cease to matter to him. He may whistle as he goes out of his gate, but half a dozen clouded faces will make him stop his whistling. And even after a sleepless night many of his worries will be blown away like cobwebs if only somebody can make him laugh.

The people therefore that I envy most are those who are fighting a hard battle but manage somehow in spite of it to keep smiles upon their faces. They stand out in brave contrast to those others who insist upon

inflicting their own little worries upon their friends, and upon describing their own trifling ailments in full detail to anyone who will listen. In almost every case these worries and ailments really are little. Big sorrows and big anxieties never speak, for indeed we have no language in which to express them

Now and again perhaps cheerfulness is the sign of a shallow nature, incapable of taking life seriously. More often it is evidence of a nature that is deep enough and sincere enough to face life with a fine courage and to make a daily effort, not easily nor without cost, to help others to do the same.

Having written all this, I only hope that any photograph published of me will not show a twenty-past eight face !

## CAN YOU KEEP AN OPEN MIND?

ONE of the most difficult tasks in life is to try to keep an open mind. I am not at all sure that it can be done. For the fundamental reason why we all look at things in different ways is that we ourselves are different, one from another. The impressions that we get through the eye or through the ear come to us not by direct impact but through the filter of a lifetime of thought and memory and experience. We are all wearing spectacles that represent what in ourselves we are, and none of us can take those spectacles off.

It is just as well that experience should count for something, and that in certain of the problems that confront us our minds are not open. Because of our obstinacy on some point of morals we older folk are often called old fashioned or even "pre war." That is to be expected in an age that likes so much to call itself "modern," and that sets itself to challenge almost every tradition and custom and convention that has some history behind it. I admit freely enough that these challenges are good for us. Our ideas are not necessarily right, because they are old.

On the other hand, our younger friends might admit that their own ideas are not obviously right, because they are new. Perhaps it is a little too late in history to make experiments in morals. Those experiments, new as they seem, have been made a thousand times.

in the world's weary story, and we know what came of them. It may be exciting to play with fire, but not so very wise when we remember how often and how painfully men and women of every age have burnt their fingers in that selfsame way.

Experience, as I have said, ought to count for something. The youngster who is off and out "to see life" may have some sense in his head, for, after all, humanity has still much to learn. But the old man in the chimney corner ought to have some sense in his head, too. He has lived long and learnt something, at any rate. The youngster would do well to pause a moment and hear what the old man has to say.

"Broadmindedness" is a virtue that modern folk are rather too eager to covet and to acclaim. There is a sense in which of course we ought to admire it. If it is the opposite of bigotry, if it indicates a spirit of toleration, if it can produce in us a willingness to examine with patience ideas that seem to us dangerously new and to try to see the good that there is in creeds and in policies and in systems, to which instinctively we are opposed, then let us have it by all means. What I do doubt and dislike is the sort of broadmindedness that obviously has no convictions of its own and in fact is much too shallow to think deeply or to feel deeply about anything.

In fair weather it is pleasant enough to drift along broadmindedly with the tide, caring little in what direction the tide may be carrying us. When the storms come, as come they will sooner or later, we shall be hard put to it without an anchor of some sort. Even an anchor is useless unless it can strike upon and take hold of something firm and strong, hidden in the

depths beneath us. It is better to take one's soundings sometimes in life. For there are rocks and shoals all around us, and it takes a very fine sailor to manœuvre his little craft on the open sea.

Somebody may say perhaps that, in throwing nearly all my weight on the side of experience, I have forgotten all the hindrances and exasperations that are caused by sheer prejudice. Let us then consider that for a moment.

We have to remember always that what seems to us to be sheer prejudice may only be an opinion that is opposite to our own. In a contemporary such an opinion would create in us no special resentment. It is when an older person speaks that we suspect prejudice and condemn it.

There are older people who realise how easily prejudices accumulate and how hard it is, as the years go on, to avoid them. Knowing that, they do their best to allow for their prejudices in making up their minds upon modern problems, by taking off a sort of discount from their strong convictions, because they have been in stock for some time and certainly are not new.

Others grow older without a thought of what is happening to them. To hear them talk about their young days is to imagine that the golden age of the earth is past and gone, never to come again. What cricketers there were in those days! Such strokes and such mighty hits are never to be seen now. And the old actors—well, they could act. The stage to-day is not what it was. The preachers too—what wonderful sermons they delivered Sunday by Sunday, year in, year out. If only sermons like that could be heard.



again, how the people would flock to church and listen !

None of us will grudge these old folk their golden memories May time grant to all of us memories like them, growing more and more colourful and glowing as we near the sunset hour But it would be an added wisdom if they could but remember that *it is time* that does much of the gilding To admit just that to themselves would keep their minds open enough to see and to appreciate some of the beauty and the goodness that has come to blossom since "all their yester-days" For it is only so, by giving honest credit to the sincerity, the courage, the patience, and the eagerness that are in modern life, that they can hope to be accepted as the kindly counsellors of a generation that sorely needs them and their hard-won experience

Stern times, maybe, are ahead of us Let age and youth, in a new understanding, try to face them together

## WHAT DO YOU REALLY WANT (IN LIFE)?

**S**ACRIFICE is the inevitable law of life. That sounds, I know, like a religious sentiment. None the less it represents the universal experience of mankind and it applies without exception to the good and the bad alike.

Religion tries to teach us what we ought to be prepared to sacrifice if we would seek and possess those things in life that are best. To reject that teaching does not mean that we can escape the necessity of sacrifice. It only means that we have decided to let go what religion bids us to keep and to keep what religion tells us to let go. There is sacrifice in any case.

You can see this easily, if you will think for a minute. Quite obviously life is a series of choices. All those choices taken together make up character. What we are to-day is the result of the choices that we have made in "all our yesterdays." Yet each of those choices meant that we had to turn our backs upon other things that we might have chosen. We could not have them all, so we had to make up our minds. And in making up our minds we were deciding in each case what we would sacrifice as well as what we would choose. Every choice involves at least one rejection. The alternative, often very attractive, must

be abandoned. Therein lies always the difficulty of choosing. We don't want to sacrifice but we must

If you would see for yourself a clear picture of life, just give a shilling to a small child who stands gazing long and wistfully into a toy-shop window. After the first moment of delight, his eager face will become serious with thought. There is so much that can be bought with that shilling. He would like to have this and that and the other. But there is only one shilling. If he buys this, he must give up that and the other. It is not so easy. Sacrifice never is

I only hope that the small boy will be satisfied with his toy when he gets round the corner, because some of us as we travel on in life are not so content with the choices that we have made. There is probably no bitterness in human experience that can compare with the secret regret of a man who got what he wanted only to find later on that it was not what he wanted, at all. Toys have a habit of breaking sooner than we think. The gilt wears off, too, almost as quickly. But the shilling is gone.

A man's youth and strength are worth more than a shilling, but he spends them sometimes just as recklessly. In fact quite a lot of young folk seem to think of life in that sort of way, as if it were a Fun Fair with no object in it at all but to plunge into this amusement or that until all the sixpences and pennies are gone. Whether we like it or not, life is not a Fun Fair. If it is, then millions of people are missing most of the fun.

There are older men and women too who ought to think twice about what they are choosing. Many of them may be taking life quite seriously. They may

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be spending their time and energy, not on mere amusement, but in the pursuit of something that they want and mean to have, money perhaps, or position, or popularity among their friends. I will not criticise them for that, since of course always it is the motive behind it that makes the aim good or bad. Why should a man want money? Why should he long for a good position? Why is he so anxious to have a potent influence among his fellow-men? Such questions are for every man to answer to himself personally, and with what courage and honesty he can. But I would like to ask what that choice involves in the way of sacrifice. What is he missing? What is he rejecting? What does he stand to lose if his choice should happen to be wrong?

The chief difficulty of course with all of us is to see life in its right proportion and perspective. A sketch that is out of drawing becomes a ridiculous caricature. So does a life in which true values are distorted, with big things treated as though they were little and little things treated as though they were big. If we could avoid this mistake, we should more often achieve the art of living which is an art after all, with a meaning in it as great as any other. It is not a matter of quantity but of quality that few imagine. But too often, as we live, we get some obsession. It may be good in itself, but it is not as no right to be where we put it—the wrong place in the frame of our picture—with scarcely a trace of the things we may trace in faintly the things that

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than that, we sacrifice quite often the happiness and the interests of others. Ought we not to be a little bit more certain that it is all worth while, that our aims are the right ones, and that our choices will justify in the long run the losses that we have incurred? Ruskin was right when he said, "I don't wonder at what men suffer, but I do wonder at what they miss."

## WHAT ARE THE BEST THINGS IN LIFE?

THE Apostle St Paul in his incomparable letters prayed more than once that his converts might have an instinct or sense for that which was vital. What he meant is plain enough. Life is a very complicated business, in which quite easily we may lose ourselves in a maze of little paths that lead us sooner or later up against a dead end, with our time gone, our patience exhausted, and nothing at all achieved.

That of course is what happens to many a man. With one such I happened to be sitting some years ago under a very pleasant verandah, looking out from a delightful house upon a garden full of blossom and colour. He seemed to have very much to be thankful for, that man, and I told him so, for, apart from his material possessions, I knew that he had done a great work and made for himself many friends. But his answer surprised me. "No doubt you are right," he said, "and I am thankful enough, though I regret

develop an instinct for that which is vital, and so learn to distinguish by quick insight that which really matters from that which matters not at all.

Two things there are in this eternal riddle that stand out quite boldly. The first is that nothing can be of much consequence to us unless we can make it permanently our own. Like children in a toy-shop we spend too many pennies on things that won't last. The exchange and barter of Vanity Fair are as reckless as they are tragic, especially when we are tempted to offer youth and strength in return for some possession that cannot be ours for long.

The best things in life are those that last the longest, that are just as much ours at seventy as they were at thirty, that indeed remain ours when we are dead no less than when we are alive. The imponderable luggage that we can take with us as we die is what we must consider of the first importance. Compared with that, the value of everything else shrinks into a paltry insignificance. There is no way even then of taking anything with us beyond death unless we take it within us. It is a question not of what we have but of what we are. What we have must be left behind. What we are is inseparably our own, and, when the body lies mouldering in the grave, it is still the very life of the soul that goes marching on.

The other truth that meets us at first glance is that in the long run if not at once we "get as good as we give." If therefore we want to possess anything for ourselves we must first give it or its equivalent to others. *Life itself, so Christ said, is only to be had by giving it away.*

I believe firmly in the fundamental justice that is

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in the universe, in "the ultimate decency of things," or, to put it plainly, in the watchful providence of God. I cannot hold to that belief and allow myself to think at the same time that life can ever be unfair to anybody. I know that very often it looks very unfair, but when we attempt to judge it in that way we are leaving out everything on the other side of death. To me and to those who think with me death is not the end but the beginning. Death is only the end of the first act. *The curtain falls, but there is more to come.* Life is too mighty a drama to show us virtue vindicated and vice subdued in the first seventy years.

Give and it shall be given to you. Love and you shall be loved. Think of others and they will think of you. What you put into life you shall take out of it, possibly more, certainly not less. If by chance any of us imagine that we shall receive this sort of dividend annually, as in terms of money or of position or of popularity, we are very much deceived. The currency of the eternal world is of a very different kind. But if we are content to store up within ourselves and for ever such treasures as courage and fortitude and patience and faithfulness and true affection, we shall not be disappointed at the long last. God does not recognise quarter days but He always pays His debts.

On principles like these each of us must decide for himself what the best things in life really are. Character comes first, I am sure, with all those varied experiences, not all of them pleasant, that help to form it. Home and friendship come next, for love that is worth calling love stands best the test of time and is the mainspring of all the virtues. Work must have an honoured place. Without it we can contribute



nothing to the common good and can only expect to receive the same. And I cannot see how we can receive anything unless we have been at some pains to acquire a *power of appreciation*. It is in this that we need carefully to school ourselves, not only in our early days but all through life, to see and to understand and to find delight in whatsoever things about us are beautiful and good and true.

Here is a path which no man will find easy, but it will lead him in the end, weary perhaps but well content, to the best things that life has to give. And they are very good.

## WOULD YOU HAVE YOUR TIME AGAIN?

SOMEbody asked me the other day whether, if such a thing were possible, I should like to have my time over again. To such a question every man of course must give his own answer, though I feel that very many would agree with me and reply promptly in the negative.

I suppose that when we talk like this in the presence of a youngster all of it must sound very depressing. The idea that he probably gets is that we older folk have not enjoyed life so very much, or at any rate that its anxieties and sorrows have outweighed its joys. How then is he to look forward to it?

The truth, when we come to analyse it, if we ever do, is much more cheerful than it looks at first sight. For in all our feelings of growing older we are thinking mainly in terms of the body—none of us in the late afternoon has the same vitality and zest as we had in the early morning. It may have been a sunny day or it may have been a rainy day—more probably, in accordance with English climate and our general experience of life, a bit of both—but in any case, we get tired. Not tired of it, I mean, but

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There is a time—somewhere in the forties—when men and women set themselves vigorously to work into this. They feel as young as ever. They can, as I see

than ever they did. So they say. It is only after a set or two at tennis that they begin to wonder what is happening to them and to ask whether after all what they see in the mirror is themselves as others see them. In the fifties that uncomfortable argument comes to an end. They know.

Insincerity is one of the two great plagues of modern life, the other being fear. Some of us might begin then, if we want to increase by a little the sum total of honesty, by asking ourselves our age. Why should this generation refuse to learn the art of growing old gracefully? Why should it forget the glowing reds and russets of autumn by dreaming so regretfully of the more radiant tints of spring? Why should it try to paint the sunset in the colours of the dawn? But it does.

It is good to be young in youth, and it is equally good, as R. L. Stevenson somewhere reminds us, to have grown older with the years. To ape youth, when youth is gone, is silly on the face of it. We gain nothing at all by attempting to deceive ourselves, and we lose the chance of that continual readjustment to life in which both our happiness and our usefulness consist. Yet how welcome a compliment it is to most of us to be told that really we don't look half our age.

Looked at in the right light it all becomes a matter of faith. Is there a meaning in life, or is there not? If there is not, then obviously death is the end of us. Rather than face such an end, the possibility of it, many a man would rather live his time again.

lection of what had been and of what again must be. Anyhow it might be better than mere extinction, since life seems always on any terms to be more desirable than death.

Even then, as you can see, we could have no higher view of life than the enjoyment that we could get out of it. Just a few here and there might want to put back the clock for another reason. They might be longing to undo things that they had done, to unsay words that they had said, to untie tangles that they had made. If they had their time again, they might think, they would make a better thing of life, better perhaps for themselves, better certainly for others. But need any of us bother so very much about these prickings of the conscience, if in any case life has no value beyond the passing moment and the night soon comes when all cows are black? I doubt whether even enjoyment is really worth having if we know that there is nothing but darkness at the end of it. Cinderella must have kept an eye on the clock, in spite of her fairy story.

On the other hand, if life has a meaning there is no going back, nor should we wish it. A craftsman with a task under his hands has no desire to leave it there unfinished and to begin again. A traveller trudging along the road may have enjoyed his day to the full but he will be thinking also of his journey's end. A boy at school would be indignant if it were suggested that he should leave Form IV and go back just for the fun of it to Form I. These three little pictures—the craftsman in his workshop, the traveller on the road, the boy at school—blend together into the idea that I have of life. Though in life, as I see

nothing to the common good and can only expect to receive the same. And I cannot see how we can receive anything unless we have been at some pains to acquire a power of appreciation. It is in this that we need carefully to school ourselves not only in our early days but *all through life*, to see and to understand and to find delight in whatsoever things about us are beautiful and good and true.

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## ARE YOU SORRY FOR YOURSELF?

**P**ITY is one of the most beautiful things in human nature until we begin to spend it on ourselves. Then it becomes at once both ugly and dangerous.

When I say that pity is beautiful, I am thinking of course of the sort that has no sneer in it. Pity that feels superior and looks down condescendingly upon some other person less fortunate than ourselves is nothing less than an insult. That is why so many in utter distress cry out that they don't want our pity. But pity of this kind is the devil's own parody of the real thing.

I do wish sometimes that those who at this season of the year are going the round of expensive amusements could see how pitiful and how desperate is the struggle that many others of the same flesh and blood & themselves are fighting for mere existence. A number of these people who spend so much upon themselves do feel real pity, as I well know, and do lend a helping hand when they can. But some

price of a new gown, the whim of just a moment's satisfaction of a passing hour, might bring ruin to a whole family, for whom at the same time there seems to be no hope at all. And in that one family, there is to be found more than in all the ceaseless whirl of social



it, it is not the boy only who has beside him the Teacher and Guide.

Death of course is a mystery, and that is what really frightens us. If we could be sure that those whom we call dead, because they are *lost to sight*, are *not* dead at all, but journeying on quite happily round the bend of the road, we should look at life very differently. If the far horizons were so bright, beyond those misty hills, we should have no eyes for what is behind us. If our life story really has a thrilling ending, it must be the last pages that attract us and not the first. But, after all, Christianity has been preaching this for nearly 2,000 years.

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**P**ITY is one of the most beautiful things in human nature until we begin to spend it on ourselves. Then it becomes at once both ugly and dangerous.

When I say that pity is beautiful, I am thinking of course of the sort that has no sneer in it. Pity that feels superior and looks down condescendingly upon some other person less fortunate than ourselves is nothing less than an insult. That is why so many in utter distress cry out that they don't want our pity. But pity of this kind is the devil's own parody of the real thing.

I do wish sometimes that those who at this season of the year are going the round of expensive amusements could see how pitiful and how desperate is the struggle that many others of the same flesh and blood as themselves are fighting for mere existence. A number of these people who spend so much upon themselves do feel real pity, as I well know, and do try to lend a helping hand when they can. But some don't.

The price of a new gown, the whim of just a moment and the satisfaction of a passing hour, might bring new hope to a whole family, for whom at the same moment there seems to be no hope at all. And in helping just that one family, there is to be found more *happiness than in all the ceaseless whirl of social*

engagements That sounds as though I am a man of extreme views As a matter of fact I am not, but I see tragedy every day that I live and I ache for the pity that in this home or in that could do so much, but it does not come Why are people as they rush along in their cars so blind to their fellow-creatures who are lying half dead in the ditch? I believe in a practical Christianity or none at all

Yet it is even worse to spend the pity, that was made for others, upon ourselves Probably it would be true to say that our most miserable hours are those when we give ourselves over to self-pity Quite often we are intensely sorry for ourselves, because we feel rather unwell perhaps, or because we think that life has not given us a fair deal nor rewarded us sufficiently for our obvious merits, or because somebody or other has been rude to us or misunderstood what we meant or spoken unkindly about us

It has been said that a cynic is "a sentimentalist whose feelings have been dreadfully hurt" I like that definition and I think that it fits most of us at times, when self-pity has got a grip of us and when in a fixed determination to be miserable and resentful we just sit and gloom It is quite easy, I find, to write and condemn the stupidity and the selfishness of that melancholy mood But I know it myself only too well I denounce it, yet, as Pooh Bah said, I do it We all do it

Only the other day I was feeling very sorry for myself because of the infinite variety of things that in a life like mine claim my attention almost every day *Then somebody asked me how I should like to spend my life adding up figures in a ledger, from morning*

till night, from Monday till Saturday, year by year, day in day out, beginning as a young man and ending as an old man, with the figures marching down the page like the columns of an unending army till the head aches and the heart aches and at last the ledger must be shut. Certainly I should not like that. Variety may be bewildering but routine is deadening.

Having got that into my mind, my self pity vanishes, and I find myself thinking with a humble and sincere admiration of the courage and the cheerfulness of folk whose lives are so little more, on the face of them, than a soulless routine, but who yet find colour somewhere and interests to keep them going. As I think of all that, I do not wonder so very much at all those eager excitements, about sport and the like, that seem to suggest at times that as a people we are a little mad. Those excitements at any rate do offer a way of escape for minds that are almost worn out with routine. It may be that sport during these last few years has been the main thing that has kept us sane.

A youngster said to me the other day that he would not like to be a parson. I do not agree with him at all about that, but I do think that some of us, young and old alike, might do well to admit quite openly that there are things in life that we should not like to be called upon to do. For example, I should not like to be the man who breaks up the roads with the automatic drill. Nor should I like to be a signalman, or a shop assistant, or a surgeon, or a nurse, or a dentist, or a miner—certainly not a miner. I have known miners and I have known the price of coal, not reckoned up, mind you, in pounds, shillings, or pence. You cannot reckon it up that way. And I feel honestly

that a weekly wage does not represent all that we owe to those who serve us and help us in the particular jobs that I have mentioned and in many others I could not do their work, but at least I ought to appreciate it and to feel the more content with my own, throwing off as utterly disloyal to my fellow men any feelings of self pity that may come when things don't go exactly as I wish them.

The best place of all to lose self pity is of course a hospital ward. If we find it hard "to put up with" the little irritations and disappointments that come our way from time to time, how is it that these men, women, and children can "put up with" the torment of pain that racks them in every limb? More than once with a mind clouded by some trifling worry I have gone into a cancer ward, only to find smiles and good humour and hope all around me. Here was one thankful that he felt a little better, here another anxious to tell me that he had slept for some hours last night, and here another wanting to show me the flowers that a friend had placed at his side. And how can a man go out again from all that or from some little dingy room where perhaps an invalid has been lying helpless for twenty years, without thinking in sheer shame that if human nature can be cheerful in the valleys it ought to shout with joy and thankfulness on the hills? For there are hills. Look down and see just where you are standing.

tempered husband, because, as she tells herself, "something must have gone wrong at the office to-day."

Moods like this complicate life in the most exasperating way. The man who parts from us at night with a laugh meets us in the morning with a frown. Then, when we have bothered our heads about it to the extent of resolving to tackle him on the subject at the first opportunity and to ask him how and when we offended him, the laugh suddenly comes back. It is all very bewildering.

Now and then in a bad mood a man will make an important decision. When the mood is past, he may realise that the decision was wrong. It may have been utterly unfair to others. It may have lost him a valued friendship. But even if he sees that, if he knows that the real problem was inside him and not outside him, if he is willing to admit to himself that he exaggerated facts and made a mountain out of a molehill and let his temper get the better of him, he is not likely to admit it to anybody else.

Only great souls admit that they are ever wrong, and of course there are not many great souls about. The rest are put to silence by their own stupid pride. It may be that they let loose upon their friends and neighbours the anger that they feel with themselves. That is some relief, though a contemptible one, and it does not remove the distress and humiliation they must face in the end silently and alone.

Now the time is coming when the medical profession will be able to help us in dealing with our moods. When we excuse ourselves and put it all down to our "temperament," there is some sense in what we

say as well as an obvious selfishness }  
 ment? Perhaps I might define it  
 basis of personality It is the total c  
 upon a spirit by the body in which it ~ ~ ~

I am not thinking of such an obvious insta  
 an attack of liver It is just worth while to mdp  
 that in passing because a liver attack does induc  
 us a definite mood of mental depression and irritabon  
 ness I feel myself that the mysteries of temperamen  
 will never be solved—and then of course only partially  
 —until doctors know more about the ductless glands  
 Some experimental knowledge in that direction has  
 been achieved already, but there lies the path, I  
 believe, to a tremendous discovery and one that will  
 mean more than we can imagine to human happiness  
 and well being

Meanwhile, we must wait, but while we wait we  
 must not excuse ourselves too easily for the conse-  
 quences of our moods If we cannot as yet understand  
 temperament, at least we can control it The only  
 way to control it is by knowing ourselves better, as  
 we really are I realise of course that we can never  
 know ourselves completely, but we could know our-  
 selves much better than we do if we had the courage  
 and the honesty to do it The study of oneself is a  
 most uncomfortable business It hurts our pride in  
 some very sensitive places Yet it is only so, by facing  
 facts, that we can get control and through that control  
 gain new power and peace

For example, a man ought to be able to break  
 through a mood by thinking himself back to its cause  
 That cause may be quite simple and quite recent  
 He may be worrying about something, or brooding

tempered husband, real or imaginary, or sulking about "something mint, or ashamed of himself because of to-day." he has done, or in a state of tension,

Moods like t'ously some news or decision. If he ating vbut face that fact about himself and admit it with anself as the cause of his temper or depression, Ther mood would disappear.

thesometimes the cause lies deeper, and then he will ateed longer thought and possibly expert help to guide him. Old troubles, old anxieties, old sins, long buried, as we think, amongst our memories, have still the power to rise up and haunt us. It is not so easy, though, to recognise the ghost. That is where we want skilled advice. And that is why the clergy of the future will have to receive some training in psychology.

In any case, here and now, if we know anything of personal religion, we can put ourselves into touch with One whose power to guide us is more effective than anything that the cleverest of men can ever do. There is a cure for moods in prayer. Why are there so few of us who ever try it?



## THE MAN WITH A HANDICAP

**L**IKE most other folk here in the heart of London I have no garden of my own. I had one a few years ago, but in those times I scarcely noticed it. Certainly I did not appreciate it. Too often life is like that. We only learn to value things when we have lost them.

Nowadays all that I can see from one of the windows where I work is a box of geraniums placed with some thought on the edge of a low roof, to give a touch of colour up against the sky and to hide the chimneys behind them.

I have watched those geraniums this year with increasing interest. They are not good geraniums. No gardener would take a second look at them. They are long and scraggy, with leaves of a very anæmic tint. In fact, they ought to be dead. One is dead, but the others have fought their way through the winter and the cold winds of spring to produce these few rather pathetic blossoms, which are not so bad after all, especially if you take into account the struggle that it needed to produce them. To my eyes, at any rate, thinking of them in that way, they make as brave a show as a man could wish to see.

Of course they remind me, every time I look at them, of people whom I have known. Life for all of them has been desperately hard in one way or

another, so hard indeed that they might well complain that they have never had a real chance. Everything seems to have been against them, yet in spite of it they have fought their way through, like the plants in the roof box, and produced something in character that is of worth and beauty.

What amazes me is not that people are so bad but that, things being what they are, they are so good. I know that wickedness and ugliness are here, there, and everywhere, and I should be the last to deny that the vital problem of humanity is what the Bible calls sin. Until we tackle that problem we are simply deceiving ourselves in all our talk about civilisation and progress. But in common fairness we must admit that the forces that some folk have to contend with are tremendous and the odds overwhelming. I am not going to pretend that these men and women of whom I am thinking are saints, in any sense of the word. The marvel, as it seems to me, is that they are anything at all.

I have watched life crush the spirit out of a man, wear him down until there is no heart left in him, no fight, and no hope. It may be that he just let himself sink down into apathy and despair. Out of that despair came perhaps long useless years of squalor and wretchedness or some offence against society that added open condemnation to the bitterness of his soul. In such a case surely I am not making excuse for sin by putting in a plea for the sinner.

If most of us had been in his place, brought up as he was brought up, hardened to hardship as he was hardened, laden as he was laden week by week with burdens and anxieties grievous to be borne, faced

with the challenge that he had to meet, turned from door after door by disappointments such as he knew only too well as boy, youth, and man, what should we have made of life? Not so very much, I think. Perhaps nothing at all.

Why then should we point the finger at him? Why should we count ourselves better than he? Why should we not pause before we criticise him and make some allowance at any rate for the severe handicap under which he had to live? It is always a good and charitable thing to make allowances where we can, but few of us are inclined to do it, except for ourselves.

This is a blind and foolish world that worships success without asking questions, and condemns failure, also without asking questions. No doubt the angels wonder why, for those questions ought to be asked in both cases. Common sense and common humanity demand it. We shall wonder, too, when at the last the lies have been shrivelled from the souls of men and the veils torn away, and we all stand confronted amazedly with things as they are. So Christ warned us.

Let me come back to those geraniums. It is not always that life succeeds in crushing the life out of a man or in subduing his valorous spirit. Some of the noblest lives I know are being lived under what I should call impossible conditions. None of these lives make much show. None of them gets much recognition. None of them claims much, if anything, for itself. But in each of them is fine achievement, a mighty faith at heart and a most wonderful courage, that God is quick to bless even if man is slow to approve.

If you want to see downright heroism in full bloom, go and have a look at some of the slums. While you are there you will find many another lovely thing, neighbourliness grown big and beautiful, good humour thriving in a very bitter soil, with patience and cheerfulness and a grim contentment, clinging like rock plants to hard surfaces and edging them with colour, nothing less in fact than an herbaceous border of virtues where you might well expect to find nothing more than a wilderness of weeds. There are weeds there, mind you, plenty of them, and it would be strange if there were not. Don't count those weeds, I beg you, but study the flowers. They are worth studying, for they cost a lot to grow.

Possibly then you may have left so much of cynicism behind you that you may be able to "stick a geranium in your 'at and be 'appy."

## WHAT KEEPS A MAN STRAIGHT?

**W**HAT is it that keeps the majority of men straight? It is easy enough in a world like this to be crooked. And human nature in itself has strange instincts, difficult sometimes to understand, difficult always to control.

A cynic might answer the question easily by saying that the majority of men do not keep straight. We must leave the point as a matter of opinion. Neither of us can prove it. For myself I believe in "the ultimate decency of things," in regard not only to the moral order of the universe but also to the behaviour of most of the people in it.

All of us have a code of honour of some sort. It may not be exactly Christian but it represents a standard of life that we accept as good in itself and worth a big effort to reach. That effort may be rather weak and spasmodic. On the other hand it may be continual and resolute. It depends of course upon the individual, but the effort, I think, is nearly always there. What is the motive behind it?

Quite possibly it may be fear. I do not pretend to have an open mind about that, for I regard fear as one of the greatest plagues of our civilisation. It is making havoc in our world to-day and producing in sinister profusion almost every kind of evil. How then

can we look to it for moral virtues? Pure water and bitter come never from the same spring

I admit that fear plays a big part still in the education of children. They learn to do the right because they find out in no uncertain fashion that it does not pay to do the wrong. Without question honesty and many other virtues are the best policy in life, though I should not care to defend that statement if I thought that life ended with death. Yet, if our real motive is to discover the behaviour that pays, our morality can be nothing more than selfishness cultivated into a fine art. I simply do not believe that the noblest things in character are based upon selfishness. If our educational system contradicts that, then our educational system is wrong.

Is it possible that in the long course of history there has been established among us a "collective security" whereby, on an agreed code of morals fashioned into law, wrongdoers are restrained by force and the rest disciplined into conformity with what we call good? That sounds very plausible, the more so because in the affairs of nations we are seeking earnestly to do this very thing. The difficulty there of course is to agree upon any moral code at all and to find any power to enforce it.

Something like this certainly has happened, and perhaps ought to happen again. No man in his senses, knowing human nature to be what it is, would wish to abolish discipline. The world cannot do without it yet, nor as far as the mind can see. Nevertheless, the utmost that discipline can do is to restrain from evil. It can never inspire any of us to what I might call a spontaneous and unnecessary goodness.

## WHAT KEEPS A MAN STRAIGHT

It can labour to produce a negative morality, full of wholesome prohibitions, but it cannot make the morality positive.

Any child can see that a life without evil may be also a life without colour or usefulness. It is not enough to say "Thou shalt not." That is only the half of human behaviour. The other half is "Thou shalt." But this, as St. Paul said, is "what the law could not do." No law can do it and no form of discipline. The impulse towards positive goodness must come from somewhere else.

I distrust logic because life is so illogical, but it may help us a little bit just here. For if fear is negative, the positive must be love. That looks plain enough, and I think that our experience confirms it. The desire to serve, for example, springs from love quite evidently. It may be love for a person or love for a country or love for a cause, but love it is every time. There may be in it an element of sympathy or of gratitude or of admiration, but all of these are secondary motives that well up from the deeper spring.

Take away love from life and what have we left? What is a man's state of mind when love is done, when perhaps in grief or disillusionment the love that he longs to give and to send out turns again, like the bird to the ark, hopelessly home? At such a moment of despair nothing seems worth while. The old impulse to do his best and to be at his best feels dead within him. Sometimes the only way in which he can revive it is to live upon his memories and to seek to be worthy of the one who is now beyond his sight.

It stands to reason that men are not going to attempt

any sort of self sacrifice because it pays them. The only sense in self sacrifice is that it will pay somebody else. No other motive can be strong enough to combat our stubborn selfishness. Men will do a lot for gain and a lot for personal gratification or amusement but the greatest and hardest things they will only do for love.

Here then is the deepest and best motive for a straight life. Love for home, love for parents, love for wife or husband, love for children love for friends—these are the bonds that bind us to the best that we know. These are the energies that keep us going. And all of them I would say, meet and unite in a love that is greater still. That greater love can only be the love of God who made us. He that loveth not knoweth not God, for God is love."



## TAKE LIFE AS IT COMES

**L**IFE for most of us is a very mixed experience. It includes rainy days as well as sunny days. Love and laughter and labour are in it, and so are sorrow and pain and care. Unless we have known all these things and more, can we say that we have lived?

Certain it is that too much happiness is not good for us. "Too much sun," the Arabs say, "makes a Sahara." Perhaps we have seen something like that happen in human nature. The people whose lives, so far as we can judge, seem to be worth least are those who have lived them too comfortably and in too sheltered places.

Apart from any reasons of health, I suppose that most of us would winter abroad if we could. We should try to follow the sun. But I am not certain what the results would be. Our general vitality might suffer.

It is possible, for example, to play cricket or tennis all the year round—by following the sun. Whether by such a method we could keep our zest for those games and play them as well as we might is another question. The winter has its uses. And even cricket can get stale.

I think that we ought to look at life in the same sort of way. It is full of "ups and downs," as we

all know, and of course we dislike and resent the "downs," because they hurt us. Yet the "downs" may be much more valuable to us than the "ups," if we know how to deal with them. It is a good thing that we cannot choose what life shall bring to us. We should choose very timidly and stupidly and remain sulky children to the end. As it is, we have to take life as it comes.

Some folk of course blame God for that. There was once an old-fashioned piety that flourished exceedingly in its day, though it did a vast amount of damage. That old-fashioned piety declared that everything in life came by the express will and ordering of God and must be accepted as meant for our good. If evil came, it must be the consequence of some fault of our own, which called for correction and wholesome discipline. If good came, it must be taken as the undeserved reward of our faith and faithfulness. In both cases it was God Who did it.

I should not like to preach that in a Hospital Ward. It would be poor comfort for a cancer patient. It would be a chilly Gospel for a Tuberculosis Sanatorium. I don't think that it would reconcile a man to the agony of a broken back, when he found himself under a fall of coal or stone in a mine. And I can't see what meaning, other than sheer bitterness, it could have for his wife.

It is not God who does things like these. If He did, He would be cruel beyond all human cruelty. If He did, Christ would never have spent most of His time in healing the sick, in cleansing lepers, in restoring paralysed limbs, in giving sight to the blind. If He did, the work of our Hospitals and all other institutions



and the pain to educate us in His own essential goodness.

Whatever may come to us, nothing can hurt us in ourselves, if we are trying to live a life of faith. The Christian is known and revealed not by a difference of experience, whether of sorrow or of joy, but by a difference that experience has made to him. The same storms, Christ said, beat down upon all sorts of houses. Those houses that are founded upon rock stand ; the others fall.

If we really believe that, we can take life as it comes and not be afraid of it. Indeed, by the grace of God there is nothing in the world that we need be afraid of except ourselves.

## CAN YOU GET OUT OF YOURSELF?

**I**T is easier to get out of London for a day, a week or a month than it is to get out of yourself. Yet unless somehow you can solve this problem of getting out of yourself your holiday will be no holiday at all.

There are some who seem to think that they can escape from their worries by making their way in August down to the sea or up to the hills. Their idea of course is to leave those worries behind, locked up in an office desk. But of course worries are never in a man's desk. They are in his head, and when he goes for a holiday he takes his head with him.

A troublesome appendix cannot be cured by taking it for a holiday tour, nor can a troublesome conscience. It may be that rest and good air will ease the discomfort a little and offer a welcome respite. On the other hand they may not. Anyhow, the malady, whatever it is, is still there.

I am not pretending that all worries spring from an unquiet conscience. Many indeed have little to do with conscience at all and very much to do with a morbid imagination. Unreasonable fears and apprehensions and dreads are generally of that kind. Quite obviously things like these are within a man, and he can never get away from them unless he can get 'us of himself. How can he do that by taking him down to the seaside?

ing

to dodge them and forget them, we should be healthier and happier people in every sense. In fact the only way to get out of oneself is to face oneself fairly and squarely and honestly—a most uncomfortable business always and sometimes very painful, but an amazing cure for worry and all the weariness that it brings with it.

Why should not a holiday give us a chance of doing that? It would not spoil the holiday, but it might give a new zest to it. Certainly it would send us back fitter in body and mind for our work.

All that it means is time to think, time to think of what we are aiming at, time to think of our motives, time to think of our affections, time to think of our hopes and fears and the reasons that lie behind them. If by chance that thinking is done with a thought of God, Who knows each of us as we are, then it turns quickly to prayer, which is best of all.

## WHAT DO THEY SAY?

**I**T would hurt us, I suppose, quite abominably if we knew what hard things our closest friends from time to time have said about us. For it is idle to pretend that it does not matter what those friends of ours do say. When therefore somebody in sheer innocence or in subtle guile happens to repeat what a friend has said we are miserable for days.

Probably we are very foolish to worry ourselves in that way about what is probably a very little thing. After all, our friends have their hasty moments when they say what they do not really mean, just as we have. And even if they mean it, who are we that we should esteem ourselves as above criticism? Love is not blind ; it has an extra eye. So love, when it loses its temper, can make a nasty remark or two if it likes.

Very few of us, however, are so truly balanced and poised in mind that we can think of it always just like that. It rarely occurs to us that we and our friends are human, and that when our friends are not at their best they may make some comment upon us, as they have known us do when we in turn were not at our best. It had been kinder that such a comment should have been left unmade. But which of us is perfect?

It is not so easy to understand why we bother so much about what other people say. I mean of course people who in no sense of the word are friends of ours,

to dodge them and forget them, we should be healthier and happier people in every sense. In fact, the only way to get out of oneself is to face oneself, fairly and squarely and honestly—a most uncomfortable business always and sometimes very painful, but an amazing cure for worry and all the weariness that it brings with it.

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It is not so easy to understand why we bother so much about what other people say. I mean of course people who in no sense of the word are friends of ours,

nor even perhaps acquaintances. They do not count with us, those people, one way or the other. We do not lean upon their loyalty. We do not look to them for affection. Yet what "they say" worries us more than a little, puts us out of our stride, and makes us feel that the whole universe is against us.

In such a state of depression there is one book in the Bible that would do us a lot of good—the Book of Esther. There is a character in that story—Haman—so insufferably proud that life became quite intolerable to him because among the thousands who were careful to show him deference there was one man—Mordecai—who would not bow down. Such a character described in a book or enacted on a stage would be almost comic. If we could see the humour in it when we act that particular part so solemnly in our own thoughts, we should save ourselves much suffering. Unless we share the pride of Haman we should take it as a matter of course that certain people will not like us and that they will say so quite plainly. We shall take it also as a matter of course that certain other people will not agree with us and that they will let us know it. Moreover, human nature being what it is, we shall not be surprised if some of the words that they use about us are rude and spiteful and even venomous. That is part of the battle of life. Why should we shirk it? Humanity is not yet a mutual admiration society, and we must take our share of criticism with the rest.

Those of us who are highly sensitive have got to remember that it is our pride that makes us so. If we long for praise and applause and kindly encouragement always and on all sides we are on the way to

becoming either comic or detestable. Is it any wonder that people should begin to laugh at us or to jeer?

Consider also the serious moral handicap that this involves. None of us can desire praise and applause to this extent without setting ourselves to live in such a manner as to obtain them at all costs. What "they say" will become for us the main moral standard. Our chief motive will be to obtain notice (not to escape it) and to avoid giving offence.

How this is to be done is not at all easy to decide. Obviously we must not disagree openly with what "they say." If by chance "they say" one thing at one time and something else at another time, then we must trim our sails very quickly to the changing wind or over we shall go.

I have no faith in this trimming nor much respect for the man who contradicts himself a dozen times a day according to the company that he is in. It is a silly dodge to try to court popularity by agreeing with everybody that he meets. Very soon he will be found out, and then he will find himself confronted with contempt. Popularity is not worth any man's soul, though not a few have tried to strike the bargain, but respect does come in the end to one who has convictions of his own and is prepared to stand by them. It is a mad world that we are in, but sane enough to admire sincerity.

Having said all that, let me add a word about the general charitableness that we owe by duty and by right one to another. We all gossip too much. It is natural that we should talk about our friends and neighbours, natural even that we should be a little curious about them, but we need not listen to all the tittle tattle that comes to our ears nor repeat it as a

matter of fact to the next group that joins us round a table

We are far too quick in "putting two and two together" and in telling the result "in strict confidence" over a cup of tea or to an acquaintance at the club. The reason why we do it is that we are so very anxious to be thought superior, for of course the news that we whisper with a shrug of the shoulders could never be true of us. We are not of that sort. And the news is news because the person of whom we are speaking has been considered hitherto as being not of that sort.

"Really, you don't say so," is an answer that brings a certain strange satisfaction to the man or the woman who has just said so. But quite possibly it has taken from the person who is being discussed a good reputation, worth far more than gold or silver. Is the man or woman who takes it much less than a thief?

## CAN YOU GET ON WITH PEOPLE?

**I** WONDER how many people there are about whom you would say that "you simply cannot get on with them?" If they are few, you are to be congratulated. If, on the other hand, they are many you must face the fact that a lot of folk cannot get on with you. In any case it is a question worth asking, for this ability to get on with people is no small part of the art of life.

There must needs be a few, of course, whose companionship is so un congenial to us that we could never find it easy to live or to work with them. There is no reason to be bitter or spiteful about it. Since we differ, let us agree to differ with some attempt at courtesy and mutual respect. There may be right and common sense on their side as well as on ours. Why should we resent the failure of others to understand us, when quite obviously we are unable to understand them?

It is a more worrying problem when any of us finds himself being left more and more in isolation or inclined by preference to imitate "the cat that walked by himself." The solitary life may be good for some, but certainly it is not good for most. Out of the silences have come the great ideas, the great discoveries, the great reformations. If there be a man for whose leadership this troubled world is waiting he is prob-

Why a lonely man, or maybe a boy at school considered rather a crank by those that know him. But out of the silences, too, have come the cries of souls that felt themselves forsaken.

I always think that one of the chief lessons of school life is to learn to be a 'good mixer'. To many boys—in fact to most—this lesson is fairly easy, but to some it is extraordinarily hard. In their minds, to live for others presents far fewer difficulties than to live with others.

They are shy, self-conscious, awkward, ill at ease, and very liable, therefore, either to pose as superior in one way or another or to retreat into the happier world of their own dreams and thoughts. The resentment or contempt that follows them is rarely deserved.

Misery must put on some mask, but nearly all of these young people would give anything to be as others are and to do as others do. It is a good school that can teach them that lesson.

The larger school of life succeeds sometimes where the little schools have failed, though not always. In the rough and tumble of the great business world, for example, it is obvious at once that we can only get on together by the rule of give and take. Among small boys it is possible for a spoilt child (or an only child, who is often in much the same state of mind) to sulk if he can't get the first innings, or if he happens to own the bat to walk off with it.

That is also possible among nations.

But with men and women who have to earn their bread and butter the case is different. They must take the rough with the smooth. They must give as well as take. No peace at all is possible on any other terms.

It may be said that there are some who seem to be always giving and some who seem to be always taking. Doubtless that is so, and it will remain so until religion (as I stubbornly maintain) succeeds in changing people within themselves, which of course is the main task of religion, and not an easy one.

Nevertheless, even now those who want to do all the taking are cutting themselves off from human companionship. I hold it true (as Dean Inge has stated it) that in the long run no man can take out of life more than he puts in. How many friendless people there are who have never received affection, simply because they have never offered it. Life is not exactly an entertainment, but we do pay as we go in. The rule is that we must give before we can expect to take.

All this holds good whether we are dealing with friends or with foes. The highest friendships are those where both parties are eager in their giving and thankful in their receiving. Home life on that basis is a foretaste of Heaven. But in the rough and tumble of which I have spoken we must be prepared to take hard knocks as well as to give them, if we must. It is strange that the most aggressive people are often the first to cry out that they are hurt.

Let us add to this "sporting" spirit, if I may so call it for the moment, a sense of appreciation of others, of what they do for us and of what they are to us. I find that hundreds of people nowadays cannot bring themselves to say "Thank you." They may feel it, but they don't say it. So it happens that we feel that acts of kindness were worth nothing much because they were not appreciated, that indeed friendliness

and generosity are just taken for granted, while we ourselves quite possibly have received the same kind of goodwill with the same show of indifference.

It is a great pity. We are becoming blunt in our speech, which may be good, but we are losing many of the little courtesies that sweeten life and deepen year by year the trust and affection that we have one for another. Perhaps we do not realise how much courtesy, even of the formal sort, can do in helping us to get on with our neighbours. It is never very hard "to put up with" a courteous person. And when we can put up with a man it is only a step further to get on with him.

I suppose that really it all comes to this—that we can get on with the people in whom we are interested. I have known men who had an intense interest in almost everybody whom they happened to meet, and who showed that interest very plainly. As might be expected, they were men with hosts of friends. Who of us does not like to be regarded with interest, provided that the interest be genuine and sympathetic—not merely curious? And we are all made of the same flesh and blood.



## WHAT SHALL IT PROFIT A MAN?

**I** WAS brought up to believe that by the time a boy reaches manhood he ought to know the difference between right and wrong. His duty then should be clear enough—to do the right if he can at all costs and under all circumstances, avoiding the wrong as he would the Devil himself.

Life, as I have known it since, has not proved to be so easy as that. There are times when it is very hard to know what our duty is, and equally so to be honest with ourselves about our motives.

But for the most part, if we have pluck enough to look intently on what lies before us, right and wrong do stand out quite clearly defined like the squares of a chessboard. At such moments our difficulty is not to discover what move we ought to make, but to decide whether we have within us the wish or the courage to make it.

It may be that the right move looks rather risky. One of the black squares near by may seem to promise a greater advantage. After all, other people move easily in and out of those black squares and take no harm, so far as we can see. Why should not we follow their example? Therefore on to the black square we go.

In that sort of way we begin and continue our chequered existence. It is not exactly a rake's pro-

gress, but rather the wandering up and down across the years of a bewildered little pawn that has forgotten the rules of the game and is willing to move in any direction, to a black square or to a white, that can offer it security.

All down the ages men have tried to solve this problem by suggesting a compromise. They have invented a morality that is not quite pagan, and, at the same time, not quite Christian. The Christian way of saving the soul is too expensive. It means—or it may mean—the sacrifice of a most alluring world. It means—or it may mean—that they must turn their backs on very glittering prizes well within their reach. It means that they must sit loosely to those very things on which they want to fasten themselves with a very firm grip. To ask all that of men seems really too much, so why not ask a bit less?

I think that the Churches have asked a good deal less. We parsons find ourselves pleading with people to come to church. The services are quite short and bright, we tell them. We realise that this is a very busy world and that they have not much time for religion. But can they not spare just a little? Is an hour too much on a Sunday or five minutes too much for private prayer on a weekday? That is all that we would ask. For the rest of the time they can go about their own affairs and set themselves to meet the incessant calls and claims of this world in which they live. So long as religion comes in somewhere, we admit that the world must come first.

It is much the same, I fear, with our morality. We may pretend to be Christian, but we are not. Our Christianity to-day has been sadly diluted and watered

down to suit the modern taste. We have taken from the Gospel certain comfortable things that we need to give us confidence in the face of the inscrutable mysteries of life, but we have left out certain other things because they are not comfortable and because we cannot blend them with our modern ideas of living.

Christ Himself spoke very plainly about people who try to make the best of both worlds. He gave very abrupt answers to men who offered to join Him on certain conditions. But that is what many of us are doing. Moreover, we want to make the conditions.

If Christ will walk with us along the broad by-pass roads that we have made, we shall be glad to have Him. If He insists still on the narrow way and the hill of the Cross, we must part company. In any case, we say, we are all travelling in the same direction and we shall all meet—He and we—at the end of the road.

Shall we? I wonder! Is this determination to gun the whole world likely to be so very profitable? Is this struggle to get our own way and to go our own way leading us anywhere? Is it not evident enough that the modern world is lost, lost in the sense of not knowing in the least which way to go, and therefore lost to us who have staked our all upon it, if there be nothing ahead of us but the dark?

We are standing to day at a point of most momentous moral decision. If it is not to be enough that the right is the right, whatever it may cost us, then what has the future in store for the human race? And how can the right be the right unless we accept

it, whole and undiminished in its stern and awful simplicity

The one hope of civilisation and of every one of us who form part of it is to get back to the Christianity that Christ preached

## CASTLES IN THE AIR

DOWN here by the sea, where I am writing this, some young folk sitting by me have been discussing the horizon. They were thinking of it in terms of miles, and turned to ask me how far off it was. Just then I was thinking of it in terms of dreams, so I dropped quickly out of the conversation. Later on I heard them agree that across the water the horizon is always eighteen miles away. Whether or not that is true, I really do not know. I have not that sort of mind.

I know that across the years the horizon seems much further off than that, and, however eager a man may be to travel towards it, it never gets any nearer. As he advances it retreats, at exactly the same pace. Towards the end of a long day it appears to be as distant as ever. In fact, it represents all the unattainable things, all the dreams that we have never come true, all the promises that we have made and have never kept, all the good that we have intended to do and have never accomplished. And that is how I have been thinking of it, as if I were a child building sand-castles behind me, and the waves were washing them away. I am in the haze now and then a great ship.

How much more of the work that we are doing than these little sand-castles? In the eyes of the youngsters are building them

it p to resist the tide But soon, when the waters turn, soon those walls will tumble, and when the children are asleep the quiet wash of the sea will have levelled on the sand all their eager spadework—perhaps before What will be left of all the proud achievements of a generation like mine, when the tide comes in? Or, changing the thought and looking away from the sands to the grey line of the horizon, how much nearer will humanity have got to its essential good when our time is done?

All this sounds rather melancholy, I know, and I have written it thus quite deliberately because I want to emphasise the fact that we are living in a disillusioned world Whatever may happen to us—and I am not entirely a pessimist about it—we have hoped for something better We have had our dreams, even if they never come true We have had impulses of nobleness, whether they are strong enough to carry us on and through to a signal triumph of the human spirit or whether helplessly and hopelessly we must watch them frustrated and defeated again and again We have sincerely wanted a world made cleaner, fairer, happier, friendlier, wherein man may work as the honest comrade of his brother man and the strong may succour the weak, and the peoples of all kindreds, races, and languages may strive together, with mutual understanding and unity of purpose, to fight and remove the evils that degrade and defile our human nature We may never see such a world, but, I repeat, we have wanted it

Now disillusionment like this is a sadness that weighs upon the soul It may be none of our fault, though that indeed would be too easy an acquittal, or it may

be, as the heroic explorer wrote, that "things have turned out against us." A sense of moral failure is not always a sense of guilt. On the contrary, it may be the sign and symptom of a high ideal of life, cherished in a very rough and angry world, and only surrendered, if it be surrendered at all, at the cost of an agony. The sadness comes in any case if the vision fades and the thing we hoped for is reckoned at long last to be impossible and the task that we set ourselves breaks into pieces in our hands. I do not say that anything like this is going to be our lot, but I do say that the chance of it being our lot is depressing unspeakably the greater part of the thinking world of to-day. If hope deferred maketh the heart sick, what sort of malady must follow hope abandoned?

I come then to a point. Whether we are thinking of world affairs on the grand scale or of our individual lives on the smaller scale, this very sense of disillusionment is the greatest reason for hope. The people who are worried about themselves and their apparent failures have less cause perhaps to worry than most of us. Those who ought to worry are those who don't worry, because they don't care. So long as we care for good and honour it and long for it, though in appearance or in fact it is far beyond our reach, we are looking in the right direction and moving in the right direction. A long and weary journey may be before us with many a stumble and many a painful halt, but we shall arrive in the end. Quite possibly the end may not have come when they bury the bodily part of us, but at that very moment the trumpets may be sounding for us on the other side.

It does not do, you know, to forget the other side

and the hosts that are there contending for the right. And it is just because we believe in the other side, in the unseen that is nearer and at the same time further than our small horizons, that we can believe also that what counts in a man and what makes him what he is destined to become is what here and now he loves and longs for, whether he gets it or not. "Thou didst well in that it was in thine heart" was the answer to David while he mourned for the temple that he could never build. It was his son that built it, as you may remember. Perhaps what is "in the heart" of one generation may be in the capable hands of the next. Who knows?

So I return across the sands through the kiddies at their play. God give them dreams worth dreaming, and us also with them the courage and the obstinacy, by *His* help, to make those dreams come true.



## DO YOU CONTROL YOUR THOUGHTS?

In the last few days I have had in my book of David Grayson's, and among sentences that are still echoing in my mind "In the slight margin by which head above the universal slime and amid all the interest and beauty of life, likewise amid the tragedy and sorrow—and joy"

A sentence like that is worth quoting if only to emphasise the supreme importance to a man that he should think things out for himself. Too often we are content that others should do our thinking for us, and indeed in a great many matters we have no alternative. But concerning life and our attitude towards it, concerning also faith and love towards God or man, each of us must think his way to some conclusion by the effort of his own mind. No second-hand opinion can help us.

Religion, for example, can mean nothing to a man if he has merely inherited it from his parents. If such an impulse has been given to him in his early years, he ought to be unspeakably thankful, but none the less he must ponder the problems of life in his turn and give his own personal answers to its questions. Otherwise when the great storms and the great chal-

and the hosts that are there contending for point of fact  
 And it is just because we believe in the unseen that is nearer and when we consider the truth that thought is ever the seed of action  
 It is so even with the most thoughtless of people, whose words and deeds seem to spring from nothing deeper than a sudden impulse. When those words or deeds end in anger or misery, the authors of them generally offer the same excuse, "I didn't think." That is what they all say. But they did think.

The actions of to day are not always the results of the thoughts of to day. It is much more likely that they are the result of the thoughts of twenty years ago. Seeds of thought are slow in growing, so slow that when the harvest comes we sometimes fail to recognise it. We are amazed at ourselves that we should be capable of such things. Who is it who has sown tares among our wheat? Yet it was we ourselves who did it, only we have forgotten. If we could think our way back to the thoughts of "all our yesterdays" we should understand.

I am considering of course the thoughts that are really a man's own. Other thoughts may come to him, and he may pass them by with little more than a casual glance, such as he may give to any of the folk whom he meets in the street. Such encounters none of us can avoid, and thoughts of that kind count for little or nothing. The thoughts that do count are those that interest us, those that we pause to examine, those that we invite through the front door of the mind and into the imagination. Though they be guests that tarry but a day, those thoughts leave something behind them. Whether that something be

## CAN YOU CONTROL YOUR THOUGHTS?

good or evil, a touch of beauty or a taint of ugliness, the years as they come will reveal. In any case the responsibility is our own. Any passer-by can knock at our doors, but it is our business if we let him in. As somebody has said, "I cannot prevent blackbirds from hovering over my head, but I can prevent them building a nest under my hat."

I suppose that there is a dominant note of one kind or another in every man's thinking. Marcus Aurelius was thinking of that when he said that "the soul is dyed the colour of its secret thoughts." No doubt the atmosphere of the mind changes almost as quickly as our English weather, and that is why we talk of "rainy days" and "sunny days," as well as of "grey days" and "dark days." It is the weather of the mind that we mean, where at one time cheerfulness comes breaking through like the sun amongst the clouds and at another time our whole sky is overcast with gloomy thoughts. Some dominant note, however, I think that there is with each of us. It may be of hope or of fear, of courage or of cowardice, of love or of hate, of generosity or of greed, of discontent or of peace. That note—I had almost said that colour—explains the man.

Now, whether we like it or not, we cannot keep any of this to ourselves. In one way thought is secret, and only insofar as it is expressed in action can we tell what it was. In another way thought is never secret. We broadcast it right and left. All who are anywhere near us feel it, and those who are sympathetically attuned pick it up almost consciously. Actually what these do is to pick up the message without knowing from whence it came.

It is not for me to write about telepathy, though I imagine most of us have plenty of experience of it. Thoughts do travel without a word spoken, sometimes over long distances. I have long felt convinced that deep thoughts throw themselves out far beyond us and often reach the people of whom we are thinking. I do not mean that they can get the thought itself but I am sure that they get some echo of it, and that the pith of it for good or for evil touches them in their souls. A man brooding resentfully over a grudge will send his hate quicker than a telegram. Another thinking kindly of an old friend will flash that affection to him almost in the twinkling of an eye. That perhaps is why, without quite knowing how, we change in our attitude towards people. They have been thinking of us or we of them.

As for the dominant note in a man's thinking, is it not true that we can feel almost at once the atmosphere of a person to whom we are talking? There are some whose mere presence makes for encouragement and new resolve, others who depress us into a sudden melancholy even in a minute of casual conversation. The encouragement or the depression has nothing at all to do with what they say. It has everything to do with what they are.

Here are facts that we have to face. Here too are things that science presently will make clearer. What is clearest of all is that one of the first of our duties is to control our thoughts. As a man's thoughts are, so is he. As a man is, whether he speaks little or much, so is his influence upon those who know him.

## YOU NEVER KNOW

**T**HERE is a saying that the future never lies ahead of us but always comes from behind, flying over our heads. The essential truth of this lies of course in the fact that we always make our future before we live it. The problems of to day are not the product of to day. They represent the tardy consequences of choices that were made yesterday and the day before yesterday. In the affairs of nations they represent the blunders of centuries ago.

On this point religion and psychology speak with almost the same voice. The psychologists insist that the only way to find a radical cure for the troubles that plague us now as individuals—fears, for example, apprehensions, obsessions, and the like—is to put the clock back. The roots of them, they say, are to be found in every case amongst the limbo of half forgotten things. What we have to do is to think ourselves back across the years, to awaken, if we can, some sleepy memories, and thus at last to come upon the incident, whatever it was, that left so deep a mark upon us and started so weighty a train of consequences. In other words the key to the present is in the past.

Religion says very much the same thing when it speaks urgently of the need of repentance. A doctrine of that sort has never been popular, since most of us like to forget what has happened painfully in bygone

days. Indeed we have made quite an art of forgetting. Moreover, it sounds very much like common sense to let bygones be bygones. Yet they dress themselves up in cunning disguise and come to meet us again in what we call the future. In other words, as religion rather gloomily proclaims, our sins find us out.

The main difference here between religion and psychology is that religion deals with acts of conscious and wilful wrongdoing, whereas psychology adds to them impressions of all sorts and kinds received from others, in which we ourselves have little or no responsibility or blame.

Now combine these two together and see how at *this moment we are preparing a future for ourselves* and for those who come after us. So far as our deliberate choices are concerned—as between right and wrong—none of them is ever over and done with at the end of the day. They may pass from our notice. They may go right out of our minds, as we imagine, and be clean forgotten. But they are there within us, alive and at work, building up the future that is to be. We shall meet them again.

About the unconscious choices that we make there is a greater mystery, but with a moment's thought any of us can see how much they mean. They do not mean as much as our deliberate acts in the making of personality, for that *lies* always within the range of our conscious will, but they make a vast difference to the weal or woe of life.

Being a parson, I have often exhorted people to spend less time on little things and to concentrate more upon the things that matter most. Only in *such a way, I have said, can any of us keep our lives*

## YOU NEVER KNOW

in a true perspective There must be an emphasis somewhere Let the big thing, that is really a big thing, have it

I maintain still that this is true, but I have sometimes wondered what chance we have of discovering—until long afterwards—what things are big and what things are small All the big things, as they prove later on to be, seem to have sprung from what at the moment can only have looked little and even trivial

Just examine your own life and see this for yourself Home is a big thing So is work and so is friendship But where did they start? In a casual meeting perhaps somewhere or other, quite unexpected and even now possibly forgotten, in a glance at a news paper, in a conversation in a railway carriage, in a letter opened mechanically among a dozen others Who of us could say at such a time, "This is one of my decisive moments Everything depends on how I deal with this"?

What we reckon to be our decisive hours are not decisive at all They are mostly hours of consequence, hours when we see plainly what the years have revealed The decisive hours came long before, unheralded and almost certainly unrecognised All that we could see before us then was a very little thing, forming part of the routine of a very commonplace day It has taken half a lifetime to show it to us for what it really was

It comes to this then Among the little things that may happen at any moment on any day there may lurk something that is marked with destiny Our chances of happiness and of usefulness come and peep at us They take us unawares, when we are off our

guard, when in fact we are somewhat bored with life and expect nothing from it. The red-lettered days in our calendar are never coloured so until they have gone.

From all this I draw two brief conclusions. The first is that for every man it is not only a right but a duty to be daily on the look out for the unexpected, for some good that at any hour may undoubtedly turn up. Mr. Micawber was not quite such a fool as he looked.

The other conclusion is that since in so many matters we have no chance at all of discerning the big from the little, at any rate until afterwards, we all need continually the guidance and help of One Who can discern and Who does know. That One can be none other than God, in Whose unchanging providence even in so anxious a world as this a man can rest content.



## HOW MUCH ARE YOU IN DEBT?

I HAVE placed at the head of my article a very unpleasant question. At least it will be so to many, and to some it may revive a nightmare. For it makes us glance uncomfortably at the file in the corner or the drawer at the bottom of the desk where we keep our unpaid bills. If it is sheer poverty that holds them there, little that is of use can I hope to say here and now. To suggest that perhaps life might be made simpler may sound rather like a callous insult to those for whom, God knows, life already is simple enough. However, if it is downright thoughtlessness that keeps those bills where they are, certainly we should do well to remind ourselves of the heavy and unnecessary burden of anxiety that weighs upon people in trade who are always paying money out and find it very hard to get money in. After all, credit is a form of trust and to fail to pay in good time, if it is in our power to do so, is a breach of trust. It is as though we had broken our word.

Some nevertheless—I hope many—will read this article in quite a different frame of mind. Indeed, it may produce in them quite a glow of thankful self-satisfaction. “Well, thank goodness I don’t owe anybody a penny.” It may be that you yourself have just said that or thought it. If so, you have something to be thankful for, I own, though I think perhaps

that you had better take another look at your ledger I would have you remember that debts are not always to be reckoned up in pounds, shillings and pence The largest debts are not to be discharged in that currency That of course is one reason, among others that are better and stronger, why our chief creditors never send in their bills

When men do us some service they ask from us a money payment, in proportion to the helpfulness of that service, so that by the money they receive they can secure from other men a service that they themselves need That is the meaning of money If in the modern world it has lost some of that meaning, we need not look much further for one of the secrets at least of our modern social confusion Yet, if we grant all that, it still remains true that the most valuable and essential of all the services that are rendered to us come from people who neither ask a money payment nor could be induced to accept it I pay for my bread and butter, my eggs and marmalade, and all the other things that I find on my breakfast table, but for affection, for sympathy, for loyalty, for understanding, for encouragement, for friendly interest and thought and counsel and advice, I pay nothing at all How can I ?

Imagine a mother sending in a bill to a son You might amuse yourself for an hour in setting out such a bill Begin then with all the pain and peril and tears through which a child enters into life Add to that the thought and the care of each day in each year, with each year's reckoning of hopes and fears, of problems and anxieties, not forgetting of course the nursing and the feeding and the clothing and the

training and the cooking and the sewing and the darning and the washing, that in their turn from sunrise to sunset make up a mother's task. Somehow or other you must include in your bill patience—*infinite* patience. How much, I wonder, ought we to pay for infinite patience? A little less it would be perhaps than the cost of the love from which patience came? So how much would it be fair to offer in return for love? The pity of it is that often we offer nothing—not even thanks. Tiny children speak their thanks in their own most eloquent way, and some others there be, no longer children, whose touching thought and care for one now growing old need no words to emphasise their meaning. Would that it were so with us all, but even then we have no chance to repay. We go to our graves as debtors.

In its own measure friendship may be regarded and remembered in the same sort of way. When Robert Browning was asked a question as to what he ascribed the main inspiration of his poetry, he replied, "I had a friend." Perhaps you too could say that. I do not suggest that in every life friendship is the main inspiration, but I do think that in most lives it is the hold and pull of friendship that makes life worth living and that keeps us more or less in the orbit of duty, instead of flying off into miseries unknown. How much would you pay for this pretty little thing in the market of Vanity Fair?

I said above that I pay for my bread and butter and marmalade. But do I? I remember Scott Holland years ago painting a picture of all the human service needed to provide a *child* with a penny orange. He talked of farmers and labourers and packers and

## DOES FAITH MAKE ANY DIFFERENCE?

I HAVE had one or two letters just recently from people who take a gloomy view of religious faith because of the very slight effect that it seems to have (as they think) upon the lives of those who profess it.

Religion, they say, ought to make a difference to a man. Yet it is not at all easy to discover what that difference is. There are good folk out of Church as well as in it, and the average level of morality and general behaviour appears to be about the same, whether there is any religious influence or not.

Well, certainly religion ought to make a difference. Its effect is not only to comfort men and women and to reassure them in the face of the manifold perplexities of life, but to change them. In essence Christianity is not a way of thought but a way of life, or rather a way of thought that makes inevitable a new way of life. So Christ taught.

In the first century of the Christian era this new way of life was very clearly marked. The difference between the little band of Christian believers and the rest of the world was so astounding that the rest of the world was compelled to take note of it.

What was it that could give this small group of quite ordinary folk, most of them peasants, the audacity to challenge all the moral traditions and standards of

their time? What was the secret of their courage their patience, their *tenacity*, their *energy*, their self sacrifice, their unity? What was it that made them sing in the very jaws of death?

All these were questions that the ancient world had to face and answer

Going a step further back, it is quite clear from the Gospel story that these first disciples were won not by what Christ said in His teaching but what He was in His own personality

What, then, are we to say of Christianity in the modern world? I think that we must use our common sense and admit that if Christianity produces poor results the fault must be in those of us who profess it and not in Christianity itself. What a man really believes must have an immediate effect upon his outlook and upon his actions

Consider what happens when a belief of one kind or another gets into the mind in the affairs of ordinary life. If, for example, I believe that the ceiling of this room of mine is unsafe, what shall I do? If I believe that the pain in my side is not indigestion, but something serious, shall I take any action at all about it? In each of these cases belief must lead not only to words but to quick and definite deeds. Real belief always does

Can we say then that a man's belief in the Providence of the God Who is above him and with him, in the personal responsibility to God for his character as the thing in life that matters most, in his duty to befriend his fellow man and to treat him as a member of the same great family, in a life that goes on beyond death to a great Hereafter, when each is judged

## DOES FAITH MAKE ANY DIFFERENCE ?

and placed by his motives and thoughts and deeds ; can these be deep set in his mind and heart and yet make no difference to him at all ? Of course, it must make a difference at once and for ever, and that difference must be profound

Where that difference is not profound, nor even perceptible, the reason is fairly obvious The professed belief is merely superficial

The best way to test Christianity is to try it If we are not prepared for that, let us at least judge it by its best examples To have just a glimpse of one good Christian is to be convinced that Christianity still works its miracles in souls that accept it wholeheartedly And, however cynical you may be, you must admit that such are to be found The rest of us are not humbugs, but it may be that we have invented a Christianity of our own, which is not at all the same thing, either in its faith or in its results

It is as well to remember, too, that the best folk out of Church do owe something of what they are to the Christian faith This is not exactly a Christian country, but there is quite a lot of Christianity in our moral atmosphere, and we all breathe it So it comes about that some of the noblest Christian deeds are done by folk who are quite unconscious of the religious influence that has worked upon them and made them what they are Anyhow, by their fruits, as Christ said, we shall know them